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TAGS: PREL PHUM PGOV RS  
SUBJECT: HR OMBUDSMAN LUKIN ON HR DIALOGUE, POWER TANDEM,  
U.S. RELATIONS

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells: Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a recent meeting with EUR DAS Merkel, Russia's HR Ombudsman Lukin expressed satisfaction with the informal human rights dialogue with Carnegie, with the next meeting scheduled for September 23, but conceded that the dialogue should raise its profile. Lukin argued strongly for keeping a human rights dialogue outside government channels. Assessing the Medvedev-Putin tandem, Lukin pointed to continuity, with a change in tone and perhaps a less self-defensive Russian posture on human rights. He welcomed Medvedev's anti-corruption campaign, but underscored the challenge of practical implementation. Noting the tendency to take Russia for granted, Lukin argued that a U.S.-Russian partnership was essential on a range of issues, and reiterated the need to lower the ideological tone of the bilateral dialogue. End Summary

Carnegie-Lukin: Less Defensive Russia?

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¶2. (C) In a June 2 meeting with EUR DAS Merkel, HR Ombudsman Lukin said he was satisfied with the "informal" human rights dialogue with the Carnegie Center, noting that the next session would be in Washington on September 23. The next step was to think of ways to make the dialogue more representative and publicized. The actual discussions were best conducted behind closed doors, Lukin maintained, otherwise participants would revert to swapping talking points in front of the press, rather than make a real attempt to analyze the issue at hand. Lukin noted U.S. and Canada Institute Director Rogov's suggestion to incorporate a meeting of his graduate students with their Washington counterparts, with a parallel dialogue on immigration issues, as one possibility for broadening the dialogue.

¶3. (C) Returning to how best to advance a human rights dialogue, Lukin argued that practitioners -- "not Foreign Ministers" -- should engage, and stressed that he personally was against "overlapping" human rights discussions with "politics and political seasons." Human rights, he argued, became a tool, and the worse the bilateral relationship, the more attention it received, with U.S.-Chinese relations instructive in this regard. Lukin said that Russia should have a right to ask about Guantanamo and secret prisons, but judged it was most effective to do so outside government channels. Holding out the possibility of Russia becoming less defensive on human rights in the near-term, Lukin reiterated his support for separate human rights and foreign policy dialogues that were "not too linked up." America, he counseled, should not lecture, and should not "expect Russia to stand in a corner." Merkel echoed Lukin's call for a less defensive Russian reaction to a human rights dialogue, which was important to get right, as U.S. relations with China indicated.

Assessing Medvedev-Putin Tandem

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¶4. (C) Looking at the Medvedev-Putin power tandem, Lukin said "it takes two hands to clap," with the "half-new" administration providing continuity. The main priorities would remain the same, with Medvedev's trips to Kazakhstan and China reflecting Russia's emphasis on its neighborhood, and his onward travel to Germany reflecting its status as the "pivotal" partner in the EU. While it mattered that Putin was Prime Minister, and his influence remained profound, Lukin underscored that "new features" would appear, reflecting the vast powers enjoyed by any Russian President. Lukin did not exclude a change in style in foreign policy, and the rotations of Russian and U.S. Ambassadors also would underline this new start. The objective should be to make relations less argumentative and more substantive, with Lukin assessing that Medvedev preferred that FM Lavrov stake out the hard-line, while the President kept to the high road.

¶5. (C) Lukin commented that Medvedev's focus on anti-corruption measures sounded good, which was why every Russian leader proclaimed himself ready to root out the practice. Corruption, as evidenced in the complaints received by the Ombudsman's office, was one of the most difficult and deep-rooted problems in Russia. Lukin argued that the steps outlined by Medvedev were sound, but practical implementation would remain very difficult; Medvedev would enjoy the full support of the Ombudsman's office in this effort.

#### Reviewing U.S.-Russian Relations

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¶6. (C) Lukin commented that the tendency was for the U.S. to take Russia for granted, dating back to the period when Russia was too weak assert itself and the U.S. powerful enough to believe that it could act unilaterally. Time, Lukin believed, had demonstrated the complicated nature of most international problems, whose solution required the participation of many countries, including Russia, China, India and the EU. Lukin noted that regardless of whether a Republican or Democrat won the U.S. election, the U.S. and Russia would need to work together. Lukin called for lowering the ideological tone of the relationship and pressed again on why the U.S. was focused sharply on human rights. DAS Merkel agreed that any U.S. administration will seek ways to engage Russia, but took issue with Lukin's depiction of human rights as an "either, or" proposition. Rather than a realpolitik versus a human rights perspective, he noted, most understood there was a linkage between the two that would determine the tenor and tone of our relations.

¶7. (U) DAS Merkel did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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